

~~SECRET~~

12 June 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Some Pitfalls in Thinking About the Middle East Situation

1. After the headlong rush of events in the past week, events which have drastically altered the political, military, diplomatic, economic, and psychological landscape of the Middle East, it would be foolish to try any predictions about the ultimate outcome. But in the spate of reporting and analysis, both public and official, which has poured forth in the past few days, I detect some built-in tendencies in interpretation which, though they may not be in error (it is too early to say) nonetheless may prove to be pitfalls in approaching our intelligence or policy problems in the next few weeks and months.

is the

a. The first/tendency to assume that, because Nasser has taken a military shellacking, he is automatically weakened politically in proportion. This may ultimately prove true, but is not a inevitable consequence of events if he plays his cards as skillfully as he often has in the past. There



25X1

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

25X1

25X1

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Thus especially within Egypt, but also among Arab nationalists elsewhere, he may very well still be the principal Arab leader.

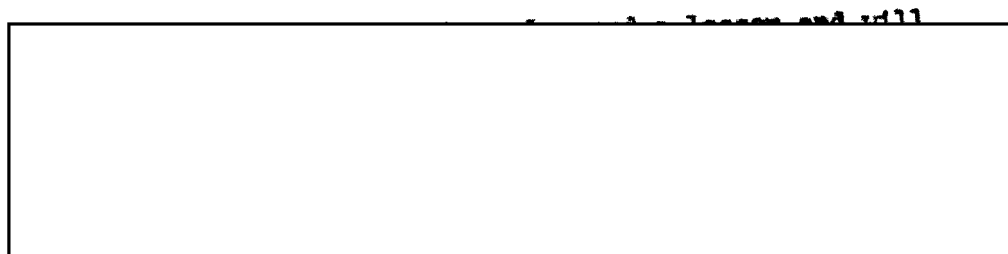
b. A second is the tendency to assume that Arab disappointment with Soviet performance will lead to a long-term weakening of the Soviet position in the Arab world. Soviet actions did indeed fall short of Arab hopes, but no other great power gave them any comfort at all, and in all likelihood the coming months will reinforce the familiar pattern by which the USSR, for all its faults, appears to Arab nationalists as their chief hope among the great powers.

c. A third pitfall (closely related to the second) is the tendency to assume that Soviet setbacks translate themselves automatically into advantages for the West. This is sometime true, but in the present situation, the US and UK have suffered far more in the Arab world than has the USSR. And to the extent that the myth of American-British help for Israel's attack persists, and to the extent that the US must appear as Israel's advocate in the UN, our position will remain weakened and vulnerable whatever the facts and the merits of our policies in the situation.

SECRET

SECRET

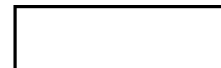
d. Finally, there is a strong tendency to assume (or to hope) that out of this mess can come a better Middle East than we have had for ten years (big plans for overall settlements, regional economic development, etc). In certain respects, this may prove true. But overall, it appears to me that this thesis rests on a vast amount of wishful thinking -- at least insofar as



25X1

incline them to be conciliatory. Even more than before, Arab leaders will prefer to avoid the risks of concessions to Israel and are likely to opt for negative stances on proposals that might appear sensible or constructive to us. Except possibly for the conservative states who want to resume the oil business, they are likely to do so even if it hurts them as much as anybody else. In short, their

25X1



25X1

SECRET